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Bliss

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Bliss

Abstract
This is a film review of *Bliss* (2022), directed by Joe Maggio.

Keywords
Addiction, Recovery

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Author Notes
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Bliss (2022), dir. Joe Maggio

Amy and Dwayne are a couple and functioning addicts, having a good time and scraping by financially. Amy has landed a full-time job at Party City, and they are celebrating when she gets a phone call. We hear Amy tell the caller she doesn’t want to talk, and the caller should not come for a visit. Later that night, Amy and Dwayne shoot up and as the high washes over them, Amy says she wants to stay in the desert forever. Amy dies of an overdose during the night. Dwayne, panicked by Amy’s death and fearful about the circumstances and police involvement, decides to bury her in the desert. As he stands over her grave, he tells her “I’ll be seeing you soon enough.”

Dusty and dirty, Dwayne returns home to find an unfamiliar car in the driveway. Thinking it might be a robbery, he takes a hammer and enters the house. A woman comes out of one of the rooms and tells Dwayne she is Amy’s older sister, Jo. She has some business to discuss with Amy and wants to know if Amy is at home. Dwayne tells Jo that he just dropped Amy off at work. Jo walks over to Dwayne and reaches out to take his hands. As she holds them, she thanks Jesus that Dwayne arrived home safe. Dwayne gets cleaned up to go to his job and Jo says she will wait for Amy at the house. Jo again takes Dwayne’s hands and prays for his safety at work and on his way home.
Dwayne returns home and Amy has cleaned the house. Everything is put away, and a pot of chili is cooking on the stove. Amy does not come home, and Dwayne tells Jo he doesn’t know her whereabouts. She may have gone with friends to celebrate her new job. She sometimes takes off and doesn’t return for a day or two. Jo is suspicious and declares she will not leave until she talks to her sister. Since Dwayne is not going to tell Jo what’s happened to Amy, they engage in a kind of back-and-forth standoff. During the standoff, Dwayne and Jo get to know each other.

We learn that Amy and Jo’s father has died and left his estate to Amy. Jo has come to ask Amy for half the inheritance, so that she can fulfill her dream to travel the world. Jo tells Dwayne how she devoted her life to care for Amy and her father after their mother died. Jo describes how she did everything right, was good in school, always obedient and completely faithful to God. Jo’s piety has kept her from drink, drugs, and sex. Jo is also very angry. Jo tells Dwayne their father sexually molested Amy from ages 12 to 16 and then Amy ran away. Amy and Jo shared a bed, so Jo was always present. Jo has developed a distorted view that her father rejected her when he sexually abused Amy, and the final rejection was leaving all his money to Amy. Jo tightly embraced intense religious practices for comfort; however, while she is with Dwayne, these practices start to relax.

Dwayne’s real name is Virgil, and he is a fugitive of a crime he committed 20 years ago. He tells Jo that Amy died of an overdose and she is buried in the desert, which was her wish. Jo leaves in a huff. We next see Jo signing the inheritance papers as she is next of kin and heads to the airport to begin her travels. Virgil needs to return to his hometown because his Aunt Bitty, who raised him, is dying. During his journey, he calls the police and tells them where to find a body buried in the desert. Virgil arrives home and attends his aunt’s memorial service. As the guests
leave to attend the luncheon, Virgil stays. The church doors open, there is a bright light, and Jo walks in. She sits in the pew across from Virgil and they both turn to each other.

The film gives us an example of someone who uses religion to deny basic human feelings and desires. The film also shows us two people can find redemption in each other.